

Dear Members of the Education Committee,

My name is Souda Efa Baraka, Past Chairperson Bridgeport Board of Education and twelve (12) year elected board member, residence, 85 Pinepoint Drive, Bridgeport, Ct. 06606

I'm writing to you today in support of H.B. 5283, specifically because of its emphasis on full education funding for public school students.

Given that this unprecedented and much unexpected global pandemic has left our students with a year and a half of unfinished learning, not mention familiar stress and trauma, it imperative now than ever that we fully fund our public schools.

Though all my children have graduated from the Bridgeport Public School system, I did have the experience of supporting my grandchildren during the early pandemic with their daily logins, classwork, and homework, all done electronically. I found that it was difficult for my little ones to sit in front of a screen, even with breaks and encouragement. It was difficult to upload homework and e-class assignments and experienced firsthand the frustration exhibited by my little ones. Additionally, my youngest son was the first wave of college students to abruptly transition from in-person to distance learning. It was very difficult for him as it was his senior year. He had his Senior Research paper to complete and had to change the thesis in March, because he was unable to compile the data necessary to complete the paper as approved. He wanted to stop, but again with support and encouragement, he completed his studies and graduated. This is not true for many of our students who are faced with unfinished learning. For many, their learning came to a complete halt, as many families did not have the wireline high speed internet access nor computers to access distance learning. This was and is devastating to our community; many of our children were already struggling due to lack of funding that, over time, has affected teaching and learning...THE PANDEMIC exasperated an already disparate system.

Connecticut is known nationwide for being a state with exceptional K-12 public education, but it's clear that not every student in the state has experienced an exceptional education. We cannot continue increasing the \$700+ million economic and racial funding gap that currently exists in this state.

The State of Connecticut needs to provide our students with the funding they need to be successful. I want every child, to not only have equitable teaching and learning, but to ALWAYS have access to counseling and therapeutic services, especially those most impacted by generational trauma and outside trauma inflicted onto urban communities. It is imperative that students be able to study in a building that has enough ventilation, and to never have to adjust to their teacher leaving midway through the year due to the undue stress that chronic underfunding has created or to NO teacher substitute.

All of our students deserve to be funded based on what they need to be successful. English Learners, students who are economically disadvantaged, and students navigating through their education in communities that experience concentrated poverty all deserve to be funded at a level that makes a real, tangible difference.

An equitably funded CT Education Cost Sharing will have an overwhelming positive impact on our district. Such funding will address unfinished learning and provide classroom support through paraprofessionals, tutors for individual student support in the area identified, and to address the social emotional needs of our scholars and their families with more social workers, counselors, and phycologists. Each dollar expended will change the trajectory of our scholars and will establish a career pipeline and not the "school to prison pipeline."

Over the last few years, many have talked about the need for equity in our state, both racially and socio-economically. Equity starts with education and providing opportunities for ALL our students. I'm counting on all of you to seriously take our public school students into account when you're making decisions about how to fund their education, and to give our students a fighting chance to not only succeed, but excel.

Funding our students fully, equitably, and immediately is long overdue, and I urge you to support H.B. 5283.

Sincerely,
Souda Efa Baraka